



Airlift & Tanker Association Conference Keynote Address

Orlando World Center Marriott, Orlando, FL

Oct 31, 2015

General Carlton D. Everhart II



Good afternoon Mobility Airmen! I am pumped up and honored to be here. General Lichte and the Airlift/Tanker Association, thank you for co-hosting another great event. There is simply no other conference quite like this. We heard a great presentation from Secretary James, General Welsh and Chief Cody. It is always great to have Air Force Leadership recognize and thank each of you for what you do. We've had a great professional development opportunity and a chance to learn new things. The exhibit hall gives us the opportunity to interact with one another. Industry learns from our Airmen, and our Airmen gain insights into what the future might hold.



Finally, this conference more than anything else is a chance for us to enjoy the comradery we share as Airmen, to share ideas and to hear the stories of our leaders.

And speaking of leaders, I want you to meet a few of them sitting in this front row. Just a few short years ago, I sat in this very audience and listened to many of these leaders tell me about the State of Air Mobility Command. Believe me, I still listen very closely to their advice.

To our many distinguished guests, General McDew, General Cassidy, General Fogleman, General McNabb, General Begert, General North, General Johns, senior leaders, Government officials, Industry partners, award



winners, leaders across our total force team and most importantly to our Airmen, thank you for being part of this 47<sup>th</sup> gathering of Mobility Airmen.

There are a lot of A/TA staff and volunteers as well as Airmen on your staff and across the Command who worked very hard to make this event possible. I am sure every person benefited from their work. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this special event.

I hope all of us have a renewed sense of pride and appreciation for the complex mission you perform. You absolutely rock! Yes, you are busy. Yes, you are deployed. And yes, there are times when you want to say “I did not sign up for this.” But nothing you do in the



future will ever replace the sense of purpose you get from serving in the United States Air Force. Just ask the ladies and gentlemen in the front row. I guarantee they would trade it all in to be part of the Team that gets the mission out the door. What you do is critical work, and it is noble work.

Whether your mission is airlift, air refueling, air mobility support or aeromedical evacuation, each of you has a story to tell. In fact, at this very moment you are writing a new chapter in our Mobility story. From our senior leaders to the youngest Airman, the common thread is you, our Airmen. If you hear anything I have to say to you today, I want you to hear one thing very



clearly. It is a simple but profound statement. We are global mobility, and we are air power. So today, I want to talk a little about our core functions, tell a couple of stories and talk about where we are and where we are going. But first, let me thank you for an incredible year.

We have been busy. And you are part of the network that makes it happen.

Active duty, Guard, Reserve, civilians, and industry partners, you empower our nation to put the American flag nearly anywhere at a moment's notice. Wow, now that was a pretty buzz-filled sentence from an old Hokie grad. But please listen to it again. You put the American flag anywhere at a moment's notice.



This time last year, we were in full stride supporting Operation United Assistance. Tankers supported Operation Inherent Resolve to answer the threat of the Islamic State. At the same time, retrograde cargo movements were ongoing in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom came to an end, and Operation Freedom's Sentinel was just beginning. We answered the call for humanitarian aide. Contingency response Airmen strengthened the en route structure, and aeromedical evacuation brought our wounded to life-saving care. Oh, and by the way, Mobility Airmen continued to provide presidential and special airlift missions to enable American diplomacy. And our



incredible mobility machine maintained a presence at all corners of the globe.

During the past twelve months, we have watched the world change. Growing tensions in the Middle East, the South China Sea and other areas of the world require attention from leaders at the highest levels. Near-peer competitors such as China and Russia are aggressively closing the technological gap. Competition in the cyber domain is an ever-present challenge, and the nuclear playing field continues to grow in complexity.

Still, our military stands ready to promote peace and stability. And when necessary, we will respond to those who want to do us harm. How does our military stand





ready to respond? Well folks, it's us. We are global reach; we are air power; and we are American Airmen who get the job done! Rapid global mobility is essential to our nation's response, and there is a growing demand for what we do.

The key to the mobility enterprise past, present and future is well-educated and professionally developed Airmen. And when I say Airmen, I mean Airmen with a capital "A," our total force. Our people, our Airmen, are our most valuable weapon system. This week during A/TA, we combined the power of Airmen and the resources of industry. We've celebrated our innovative culture and discussed the future of Global Reach. We



brought High Flight, Phoenix Stripe, and Corner Stone along with nine other mini-conferences to A/TA, to develop our core of officers, enlisted and civilian Airmen. But education in itself is not enough. In order to shape our global enterprise, we must face challenges and find ways to succeed against overwhelming odds, like the selfless Airmen who came before us.

Our past is full of stories like the one you just saw. I have another one for you.

Seven decades ago, Mobility airmen used the C-47 to fly “The Hump.” Army Air Forces were given the monumental task to move cargo from India over the Himalayas into China. They lacked the capability in both



training and equipment to accomplish the task. But bold, brave Airmen answered the call, met the challenge and beat overwhelming odds. The cost was high in both aircraft and lives. Their sacrifice led to a better understanding of airlift.

General William Tunner, commander of the mission known as “The Hump” and father of what later became AMC said this about his troops: “Only such men, dedicated to air transport, can direct this complex new military service with full efficiency.” Now we may not be at full efficiency yet, but we’re pretty darn good.

Earlier this year, a devastating earthquake struck Nepal. Mobility Airmen responded to the same area of



the world where Airmen of the Hump flew decades earlier. This time we had the right training and equipment. Let me introduce Col Lindsey and Brian Erts. They are going to tell you about the teamwork that makes Rapid Global Mobility possible.

\*\*\*

We have come a long way in the last 70 years. What about the next 70 years? Our nation needs Mobility Airmen to lead us to a future where today's innovations will become routine.

Later this evening, A/TA will recognize the individuals in this photo for their key roles in refining the design of the C-17. These Airmen exemplify the strength



of our enlisted force. They played a vital role shaping the aircraft that made our rapid response to the Nepal crisis and many other missions possible. Gentlemen, thank you for your enduring contribution to Air Power.

Other Airmen, like these helped design the C-5M and the C130J. The C-5M is a game changer, in speed, payload, and mission reliability. It has set 43 airlift world records so far. To say this is not your grandad's airplane is a vast understatement. Back in October of 2001, then-General Tony Robertson and the Mobility team faced a big challenge. They had to get supplies to our hub in Diego Garcia to take the fight to Osama bin Laden. And, by the way, the Director of Mobility Forces in Diego was



Colonel Darren McDew. General Robertson's team had 22 legacy C-5s broken on the ramp in Guam. He and his team could have used a few of these.

As one of the most flexible airlifters in the world, the C-130J is the perfect complement to round out our mobility platforms. Our airlift fleet is in a good place right now, but what about the future?

What will the C-X look like? What new capabilities will it bring? In the very near future, we will work closely with our joint partners to design a cargo space that gives our users more agility and better situational awareness while en route to the drop zone. But many questions remain. Will the next airlifter be a communications



node? How will it operate in a contested environment?

Will it be manned? We are laying the foundation for a mobility requirements study to answer some of these questions. Truth be told I am not sure what the next airlifter will look like, but I do know one thing. Together, our Airmen and industry partners will drive the best solution. And yet, that is not enough.

As the mobility fleet evolves, we must advance the way we train to maintain readiness. We need to get more bang for every training dollar. And when we exercise, we have to do it with Joint and international partners, just like we did with Talisman Saber.



Talisman Saber showcased what Rapid Global Mobility can do. Dropping paratroopers is a capability we train for all the time. This mission was different because the paratroopers jumped after a 16-hour trans-Pacific flight. The Royal Australian Air Force and five airlift wings participated in the drop, including a reserve crew from the 446<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing. Seven KC-10s enabled the non-stop flight. A joint, total force delivered an air power package of over 450 paratroopers. The ability to respond in areas of the world separated by vast stretches of ocean with limited en route support structures is awesome. Rapid global mobility makes it happen.





Now just think about this for a minute. Can you imagine what our adversaries think when they see this capability? A mere 16 hours after making a bad decision, me and five hundred of my best friends land in your backyard. Wonder if that might change their calculus? But it's not just airlift. Our tankers play a big role.

The KC-135 has been the bedrock of the refueling mission for nearly 60 years. Anyone with a tanker background can joke that when the F-22 flies to the boneyard, it will probably get a double A/R from a KC-135. During the Vietnam War, airborne controllers often asked the Young Tiger Tanker Task force, "Will you take a



vector?” That’s code for “will you risk your lives to fly into North Vietnamese airspace to refuel fighters?” And just like we saw in the video, they never hesitated. Their answer was always yes. Now let’s flash forward.

Back in December of last year, the crew of Elite Six Zero answered an alert call to support troops in contact. Within an hour of the call, their KC-135 was airborne. During the next six hours, they conducted air refuelings with multiple aircraft at 5,000 feet above the ground at night in mountainous terrain. The crew and their defenseless KC-135 encountered enemy fire, and their radios were jammed but they stayed in the fight, air-refueled themselves and went back into the fight before



diverting into a high-risk recovery airfield. I think the Tiger crews from Vietnam would be proud of Elite Six Zero.

Their actions resulted in 33 enemy K.I.A. They provided life-saving support for coalition ground forces and enabled the medevac of a critically wounded soldier.

Ladies and gentlemen, global mobility is air power.

Missions like this one don't happen every day, but our Airmen train for it so our partners know we will always be there. And remember this this is important literally hundreds of Airmen touched that mission long before the crew got the alert call. Every one of those Airmen changed the lives of the troops on the ground.



Mobility Airmen are off-loading more fuel now to support the fight against the Islamic State than when we had 130,000 troops on the ground in Iraq. The demand for tanker gas is high, and it isn't limited to the Middle East. Let me give you an example.

Back in February of 2013, two B-2s flew a 37-hour mission to drop dummy bombs on a range in South Korea as part of an exercise. This unique capability assures our allies and partners. It deters aggressive action and demonstrates our reach in the Pacific. It would not have been possible without the support of over 25 KC-10s and KC-135s.



Now more than ever, our tankers must stand ready for all missions, especially the nuclear deterrence mission. But it's not as easy as it used to be. Peer nations are refining technologies to deny access to airspace. We've got to think about how our tankers will operate in contested environments.

The KC-46 is a step in the right direction. Advanced avionics and communications equipment will increase situational awareness for operators so they can get closer to the fight. But gaining access to the airspace is only one of the challenges. We also need to establish a ground presence.



Our expeditionary capability provided by contingency response Airmen plays a key role in America's 9-1-1 force. Their mission is to deploy versatile Airmen into complex environments to kick down the doors.

Five months ago, Mobility Airmen from the 621<sup>st</sup> Contingency Response Wing opened an air base in Iraq only miles from the front line. These 42 Airmen, from 10 different AFSCs, did everything from fill sand bags to control dual runway operations. They handled upwards of 14 aircraft and 125 short tons of cargo per night. To the outsider, it looks like it just happens. But it happens



because of a very talented team, and I am proud to call them Mobility Airmen.

I want to highlight a couple of takeaways from this operation. First, Mobility Airmen and the complexity of the mission is often misunderstood by our sister services. Second, the Task Force leadership, made up of Marines, was surprised that our Contingency Response Airmen could live like Marines. But after seeing our men and women in action, their perception of Airmen changed.

This is TSgt Michael Folk. His AFSC says he's a loadmaster, but I call him leader. He led the effort at Al Taqqadum. NCOs like Sergeant Folk are the foundation of our military. They have been busy developing tactics,



techniques and procedures across our command and they are the key to improving Rapid Global Mobility. I wanted to thank TSgt Folk in person, but he couldn't make it. His commander, Lt Col Benwitz, is here to represent him. Kyle, thank you for what you and your team are doing to improve air mobility support.

From Al Taqqadum to Nepal, and from Talisman Saber to Inherent Resolve, everything we do happens because of extremely talented and resourceful Airmen.

You control a global area of responsibility with aircraft taking off every two and a half minutes. There are thousands of people that come together to make the mission happen.





From administration, to intelligence, to flight managers and command post controllers, Airmen are our most valuable weapon system. From security forces, to fleet service, to maintenance and aerial port, Airmen are our most valuable weapon system and our families support us every step of the way.

Everything we talked about today happens because of you. Our mission and our duties require that we put our most valued resource, our Airmen, in harm's way. Sometimes the unthinkable happens. Unfortunately, that happened recently with the loss of Torque 62. I'd like to pause to remember all those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.



\*\*\*

I take comfort knowing that AMC airmen who have gone before us were there to welcome them home with open arms.

Loss of life is a harsh reality in our line of work. But we've made vast improvements to save more lives. And we have come a long way in the last 25 years.

The survival rate of patients has increased over 20% because of Airmen. What used to take us 10 days now takes us 3. Just a few years ago, doctors would have told you we couldn't fly patients in critical condition around the world. Now we do it routinely. I will redirect



an aircraft to get to our wounded every time. I don't care if the cargo is late or if we miss an air refueling. We will go to the end of the earth and spare no expense to save one life.

This is SSgt Taylor Savage. She is an outstanding combat medic Airmen. She's been promoted below the zone and she's earned the Diamond Sharp award.

Naturally we put our best where they are needed most.

So back in 2013 we sent Taylor to Bagram. As a first responder, SSgt Savage put herself in harm's way to help others. Two weeks before she was scheduled to come home, Taylor was injured in an IED explosion on Highway 1 en route to Ghazni. She suffered a punctured lung,



shrapnel wounds to the face and extremities and more fractured bones that I care to mention. Airmen came to her aide.

Taylor was medically evacuated to Shank, then aeromedically evacuated to Bagram, Landstuhl, and Andrews. 48 hours after her injury, Taylor arrived at Walter Reed. Airmen from our Evac Teams and Air Transport Teams watched every heartbeat along the way. That is rapid global mobility: from an outpost in Afghanistan to Walter Reed in 48 hours. Nobody else can do that! If we can get a patient to high-level care in the first “golden hour” they have a 98% of survival.



SSgt Taylor Savage made the choice to serve, a choice to risk her life for others. She is alive today because thousands of our men and women made the same choice. SSgt Savage will be the first to tell you that machines and airplanes didn't save her people did.

Taylor would also tell you that her positive attitude and support network are vital. Her mom took a year away from work to be at Walter Reed. Taylor's case manager, Ed A Dalton, and her recovery care coordinator, Jennifer Roman, have been instrumental.

I talked to Taylor the other day. She wants you to know a couple things. First, the choice you've made to serve comes with real risk, and you need to be prepared.



Second, she wants you to know she appreciates the improvements you've made to rapid global mobility. She's alive today because of them.

I started by talking about people, and that is where I will end. Make no mistake: Airmen are our most valuable weapon system. The people in this audience will determine what the AMC of tomorrow looks like. Airmen will develop the next airlifter and the next tanker. We will continue to improve air mobility support, and we will continue to save lives.

How will we use directed energy, hypersonics, nanotechnology and remotely piloted or autonomous systems? Are there answers in those technologies that



the next tanker and airlifter will utilize or will they use something that hasn't been imagined yet? Does someone in this audience have the one idea that will make the difference tomorrow? I know one thing for certain: Airmen will develop those capabilities to guarantee Global Reach in the future. It is what we do. It is in our blood and we are known for our excellence.

Do you realize how important you are? Do you understand the impact your job has on the lives of others?

\*\*\*

I am TSgt Aastria Gathings. I was part of the Al Taqqadum team and I am Airpower.



I am Marty Shroyer. I plan Airlift Missions like the one that enabled the Nepal response and I am Air Power.

I am Captain Justin Munger. I was a pilot on Elite Six Zero and I am air power.

I am Captain David Grzechowiak. I was the Medical Crew Director on SSgt Savage's flight from Afghanistan and I am Air Power.

I am SSgt Taylor Savage and I am Air Power.

\*\*\*

Thank you all for being here. Taylor, we're glad that you could be here tonight. Your story is incredible, and





I'm humbled you've allowed me to tell it on your behalf.

But I need another minute, because I forgot to mention two people earlier. When Taylor deployed, she was one of only three combat medics. The other two also happened to be female Airmen, SSgt Maria Szymanski and SSgt Amber Frederick.

The three of them made a special pact to take care of each other if anyone was struck by an IED.

As fate would have it, Staff Sergeant Maria Szymanski was in the first vehicle to respond and SSgt Amber Frederick responded soon after. Despite being disoriented, Taylor recognized Maria, and smiled. Maria and Amber made good on that pact.



Taylor, I know you're grateful for all the airmen and the entire joint team who helped you along the way, but I know you have a special bond with these two Airmen, and you asked me to thank them for you. I thought it might be better if we thanked them together in person. Maria and Amber, would you join us on stage?

\*\*\*

Ladies and gentlemen, Global Reach would not be possible without these Airmen. Global Reach would not be possible without you. In the next year, each of us will help write our story and every story is crucial to our legacy. These are the stories we will tell our



grandchildren. I want all of us to be proud of our mission  
and our story. We are global mobility, and global  
mobility is air power!